

Termites

July 1998

Exterminating Termites

If you think you have a termite infestation in your house, you need to call a structural pest control company to conduct a professional inspection. To find a company, ask friends or coworkers for recommendations, or check the yellow pages. But before making an appointment, make sure the company is licensed and in good standing by calling the Structural Pest Control Board at (916) 263-2533.

If the inspection finds evidence of drywood termites, you have several options, depending on the degree of infestation. **Fumigation** and **heating** of the entire house are the only options that ensure eradication in the entire structure. If the infestation is contained in a small area, local or spot control may be effective; however, hidden infestations in other parts of the structure will not be eradicated.

Total (Whole-House) Eradication

There are currently two methods for total or whole-house eradication of drywood termites—fumigation and heat. For **fumigation**, you must remove all pets and plants and remove or seal medications and food. You will be required to stay out of the house from six hours to one week, depending on the type of infestation, the size of the house, and other factors. The house is then enclosed in a "tent" of vinyl-coated nylon tarps or sealed with plastic, tape, or other materials. The fumigator will post a sign on the property when it is safe to return. (NOTE: Subterranean termites require separate treatments to create a barrier between the structure and their nest in the ground.)

For the **heat** method, pets, plants, and other items that might be damaged by high temperatures must be removed. The house is then covered with tarps, and hot air is blown into the tarp until the inside temperature reaches 140° to 150°F and the temperature of the structural timbers reaches 120°F. The time to complete this procedure varies greatly from one structure to another, depending on factors such as the building's construction and the weather conditions. The procedure may not be practical for structures that cannot be heated evenly.

Local or Spot Control

Local or spot control methods include the use of pesticides, electric current, extreme cold, localized heat, microwave energy, or any combination of these methods. Local or spot control also includes the removal and replacement of infested structural timber. These methods are intended to remove or kill termites only within the specific targeted area, leaving open the possibility of other undetected infestations within the structure. **These treatments are NOT designed for whole-house eradication.** Any pest control company that claims whole-house results with local or spot control methods is guilty of false advertising and should be reported.

Local or spot treatment with **pesticides** involves drilling and injecting pesticides into infested timbers, as well as the topical application of toxic chemicals. The **electric current** method involves delivering electric energy to targeted infestations. For the **extreme cold** method, liquid nitrogen is pumped into wall voids adjacent to suspected infestation sites, reducing the area to -20°F. The **localized heat** method involves heating infested structural timbers to 120°F. The **microwave** method kills termites by directing microwaves into termite-infested wood.

Complaints

If you have a complaint about a pest control company or wish further information, call the Structural Pest Control Board at (800) 737-8188, Extension 2 (in Sacramento call 263-2533).

If you see the following signs in your house, you might have termites:

- sawdust-like droppings
 - dirt or mud-like tubes or trails on the structure
 - damaged wood members (like window sills)
 - swarming winged insects within the structure, especially in the spring or fall
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